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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000102

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SUBJECT: ECOWAS ELECTIONS ACTIVITIES

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Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: ECOWAS has established an Electoral Assistance Unit within its Commission for Political Affairs, Defense, and Security. The unit is preparing to field assessment teams to seven presidential and legislative elections in the subregion in 2007, including Nigeria's April polls. Former Gambian President Dawda Jawara will head a team assessing Nigeria's pre-election climate beginning January 22. ECOWAS anticipates that it will sponsor an observer mission of around 200 people during Nigeria's April 2007 polls. The organization does not have sufficient funds in its 2007 operating budget for its proposed regional elections activities and ECOWAS plans to approach donors and international organizations for assistance. End summary.

ECOWAS Democracy Protocol

¶2. (U) ECOWAS bases its democracy and elections activities on the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, established in December 2001. The protocol states that elections should be organized by a neutral or independent body, that voters' rolls should be prepared in a transparent manner and that parties and voters should have access to the rolls "whenever the need arises," that the preparation and conduct of elections and announcement of results shall be done in a transparent manner, and that all holders of power shall refrain from acts of intimidation or harassment against defeated candidates or their supporters. The protocol also says that at the request of any member state, ECOWAS may provide assistance in the conduct of any election. Even if no assistance is requested, the Executive Secretary (now the President) may send a "fact-finding Mission" to any member state conducting elections. The mission may gather information on pre-election conditions, meet candidates, political leaders, and government authorities, and assess the status of preparations for the elections. Finally, the President of ECOWAS may choose to send an Observer Mission to an election in any member state. The Observer Mission will be comprised of nationals of other ECOWAS states and must include women. The team will arrive in country at least 48 hours before the elections and may establish links with NGO or other observer teams. The Mission should remain in country throughout the election period and until results are announced. The Observer Mission shall submit a report to the

ECOWAS President. In the report, the Mission should give its assesment of the conduct of the elections from the perspective of the host country law and the "universal principles in electoral matters." The report may also contain the team's recommendations for improvement of the conduct of future elections and monitoring Missions.

Upcoming 2007 Activities

13. (C) Poloff met January 12 with Colonel Mahamane Toure, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Defense, and Security, and Mr. Francis Oke, program officer in the ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Unit. Oke explained that ECOWAS planned to send Missions to seven of its member states conducting elections in 2007: Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Benin, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Togo. An initial 5-person exploratory mission went to Senegal in December for 2 weeks. ECOWAS also plans to send a second mission headed by former President Soglo to Senegal in late January. According to Oke, the Elections unit of ECOWAS is finalizing a handbook and a code of conduct for ECOWAS Observer Missions, which they created with help and funding from Germany's Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. However, ECOWAS does not have sufficient funds in its budget for all of its planned elections activities in 2007. Both Oke and Toure said that ECOWAS was trying to establish a clearer picture of the projected costs for activities surrounding the seven upcoming elections in the subregion. They plan to use that cost information to approach donors and NGOs for assistance and have already had preliminary discussions with IFES and the Danish government.

ECOWAS on Nigeria

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14. (C) An exploratory mission headed by Dawda Jawara, former President of the Gambia, will spend three weeks in Nigeria beginning January 22. The team will also include the head of Ghana's electoral commission and Ghanaian General Obeng as well as ECOWAS staff. Oke explained that the Mission would take into account the reports published recently by other assesment teams such as IRI, NDI, and the EU. The report of the ECOWAS exploratory mission will not be made public, however. It will be an internal document sent to Dr. Chambas, the ECOWAS President, who will then decide whether any "mediation" is necessary to encourage Nigeria to address problem areas before the election. Should mediation be needed, both Toure and Oke explained that it would take the form of "quiet diplomacy" between ECOWAS and the GON. In the past, Toure, said, such quiet diplomacy has included using the good offices of former Nigerian rulers like General Gowon and General Abdulsalami (both members of the ECOWAS Council of Elders) to intervene with the GON on behalf of ECOWAS regarding any problem areas which need to be addressed. Colonel Toure indicated that ECOWAS has not recieved any requests for election assistance from the Nigerian government. However, he believes that given the importance of the upcoming elections and the country's size, ECOWAS will send its largest ever Observer Mission to Nigeria in April. Toure estimated that an observer team of 200-300 people may be required to adequately observe Nigeria's polls.

15. (C) Both Colonel Toure and Mr. Oke were somewhat reluctant to share any personal assesments of Nigeria's election preparations to date, and Poloff acknowledged that ECOWAS had a "special relationship" with Nigeria as both the largest country in the subregion and the host of the organization's headquarters. Mr. Oke, a native of Benin who worked previously around Africa for IFES and USAID on elections, did note that he found the lack of publicity for the ongoing voter registration exercise "odd." In Benin and other countries in which he worked, he explained, there was

much more publicity on television and radio about how and where to register to vote. He found the lack of information available to average Nigerians "troubling."

COMMENT

¶6. (C) It is good that ECOWAS seems to be taking an active interest in upcoming elections around the subregion, though troubling that they are only now thinking about where to obtain funds for their proposed election activities. Despite the organization's delicate relationship with Nigeria as its largest member and host country, ECOWAS seems to understand the need to engage soon with the GON regarding its lackluster election preparations. The report of the upcoming exploratory mission may spur Dr. Chambas to engage in quiet diplomacy in February, adding an important regional voice to the chorus warning that all is not on track for Nigeria's April elections.
CAMPBELL